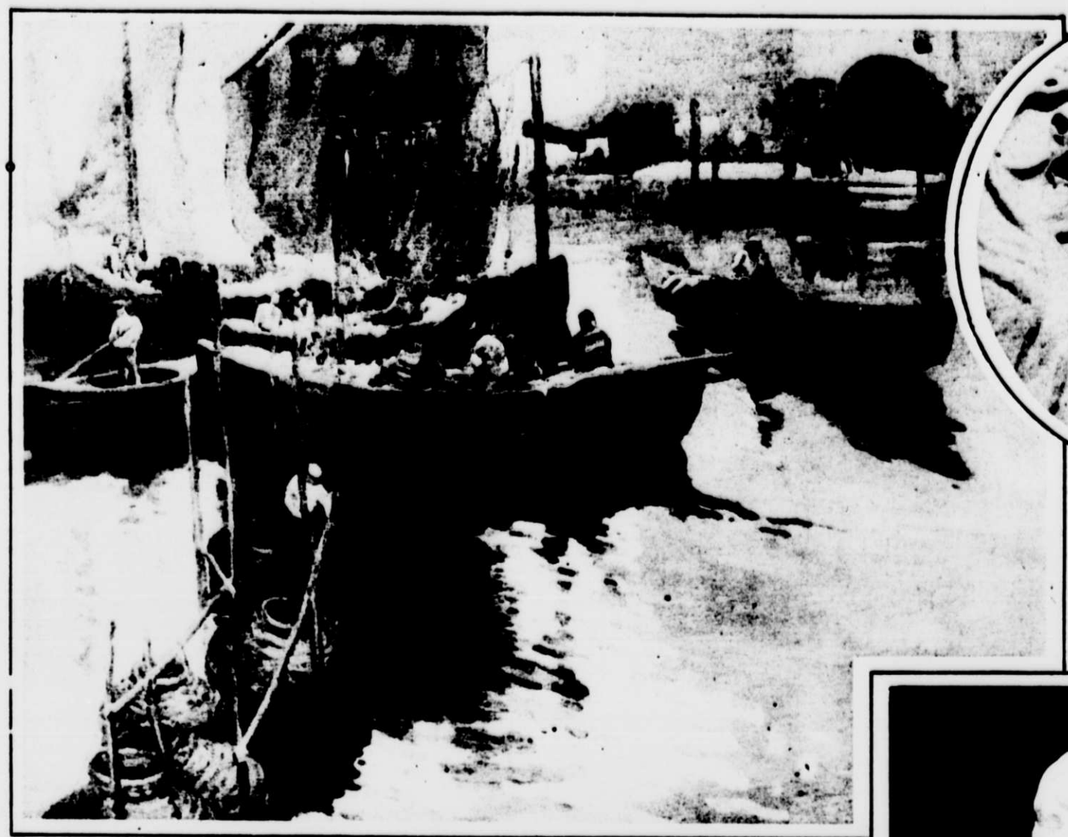
ARTISTS DESERT EUROPE TO FOUND ART CENTRE HERE



"LA GUIDECCA." BY GEORGE ELMER BROWNE.

IRENE PRAHAR, THE SCULPTOR, AT WORK.

"A WET DAY IN BELGIUM." BY CATHRINE WATKINS.

WILLIAM A. SHERWOOD.

MRS. CATHRINE WATKINS.

GEORGE ELMER BROWNE.

"THE CIGARETTE," BY CECIL DE B. HOWARD.

CECIL DE B. HOWARD.

MAX BOHM.

HARRY B. LACHMAN.

IT is "America First" now with the army of American artists whom the war has driven back from Europe. Painters, sculptors, etchers and musicians are declaring their determination to make this the leader artistically among the nations of the earth and New York the art capital of the world—provided the public will help.

Their purpose, many of the artists confess, is not born of an altruistic spirit. They remained abroad as long as they could do so comfortably and profitably and grumbled more or less when they touched their native shore. Some intended to remain here only until conditions in Europe should improve sufficiently to make their return possible. A few still cling to that determination; a few, indeed, consider America hopeless artistically. These are the irreconcilables in the world of painting and sculpture—the hyphenates. But scores of others are to make this their home permanently.

Nobody knows how many prodigals have sought the paternal hearth since the war started, or what proportion will remain here always. It is estimated that in two months, nearly a year ago, five hundred returned from Europe, this number including only men and women who handle the brush or the chisel, musicians not being included in the enumeration.

Before the European upheaval there were three distinct American artists' colonies in Paris—a large one in the Quartier Latin, a smaller one in Passy, a third in Montmartre. Now there is developing a big Paris art colony in New York. It is widely scattered as yet—many of the artists have opened studios in attractive suburban villages—but the total number is large and the influence to be exerted is certainly great.

Mrs. Cathrine Watkins, one of the returned painters, has suggested the formation of an ante-bellum society, composed of persons who lived abroad before the war, to nurse memories which all hold dear—a community of sentiment rather than of self-interest. Mrs. Watkins lived in the Latin Quarter nine years.

In visits to studios and to certain more or less bohemian cafes one hears many and widely divergent sentiments regarding the future of New York as the art capital. The artists are unanimous in recognizing America's advance in recent years, but the note of encouragement is tempered in nearly every instance by reservations. All agree, however, that American artists are as talented as any and in the opinion of most if art in this country lags the people at large are to blame. One, a woman sculptor, places the responsibility squarely up to the artists themselves. "When we demonstrate that we are the best in the world," she says, "the public will not withhold its recognition."

Max Bohm, who is here to stay after living thirty years in Paris, advocates a yielding of prejudice by both artists and public.

"If our art is to reach a paramount position our public must be more independent in its judgment," he says. "It must free itself from European tradition and recognize what is good and great in the work of its own artists, making that work its very own because it is both American and meritorious."

Mr. Bohm won a gold medal at the Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco this year on a portrait of Mrs. Bohm. He has won medals also in the French Salon, the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1900, the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo and the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis, and is represented in the Government owned Luxembourg Museum in Paris.

It was Frederick MacMonnies, the sculptor, who exclaimed on reaching his native soil after thirty-one years residence abroad: "New York has arrived."

"It shows it in a score of ways," Mr. MacMonnies explained, after he had made a more detailed study of present day conditions here. "One of my earliest memories of this town was of walking down Fifth avenue and studying the fronts of the then leading hotels. The window of every one of them was filled with the soles of men's shoes. The men were leaning back in the chairs ranged in the corridors, their feet elevated against the panes. And, too, those were the days of cuspidors!

"Now, see the difference. Here we are on a plush divan"—he was in a modern Fifth avenue hotel—"our feet on a Turkish rug, with music floating from behind that bank of palms. And speaking of rugs, I have in mind one of the most certain indications of our progress. We even have tapestry looms here now. Before long Americans will do all their own designing as well as the weaving.

"And note the progress made in our great museums in recent years—the Metropolitan and the Brooklyn Institute, for instance. With the development of such institutions art centres change. Carthage, Byzantium, Athens, Rome—each was the capital for a time, then yielded supremacy to another. New York's day is coming, and more rapidly than most persons realize. I am going to evidence my faith in its future by making this my permanent residence."

In the opinion of George Elmer Browne, another of the returned painters, New York is destined to be not only the art market of the world but the centre to which art students will flock in far greater numbers than ever before.

"It is demand that creates an art capital," says Mr. Browne. "The demand is here and it is growing rapidly. This country, and New York, in particular, has witnessed a remarkable advance in the last few years, and with the return of scores who had gone abroad for study and work the opportunities which it offers will be more and more recognized."

William A. Sherwood, painter and etcher, who has come back after ten years residence in Europe, is yet another who testifies cheerfully to the great artistic progress made by the United States in recent years. "And we will continue to grow," he says. "The war is making people everywhere think deeper, and our nation, as well as the whole of Europe, will profit in consequence.

"What we need above all things else is to declare our freedom from European influence. Then only will the artists receive the encouragement necessary to stimulate them to their very best and most productive work."

Harry B. Lachman, back from Paris, asserts that "New York offers finer subjects for painting than any European city." He says:

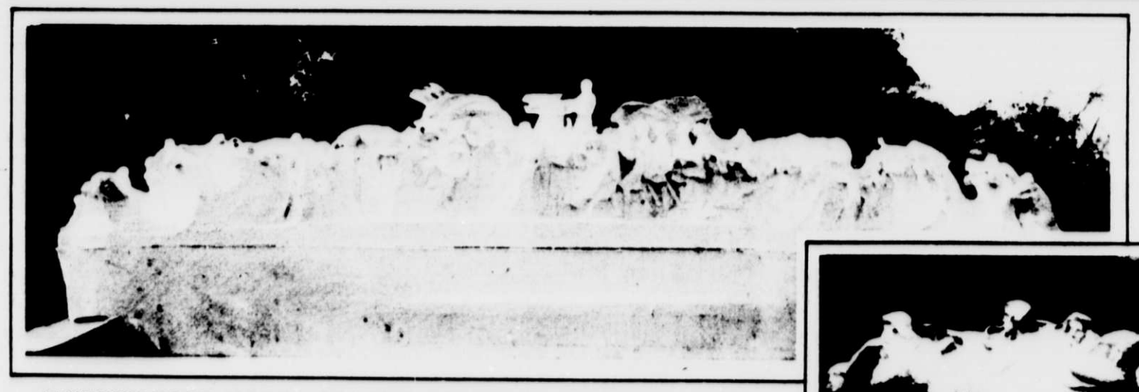
"New York's architecture is unique. In no other country can there be found a sky line or a street line similar to those in evidence here. Hence there is an opportunity for the development of a distinctive American 'school,' which will be entirely original and free from the influence of the old masters."

Irene Prahar, sculptor, is the one among the returned Americans who emphasizes most strongly the debt which she believes the artists owe to the public, despite the complaint of many that the public is not always appreciative.

"It is true," she says, "that the United States does not give its artists every possible encouragement, as France, Italy, Spain and Germany have done for years. But the fault, if a fault exists, does not lie entirely with the public. After all, it is not right that American artists should desert the land that gave them birth. Now is the time for every one of them to buckle down and devote his best energies and talent to developing the highest forms of art here at home. Our artists will prove themselves the best in the world and thus demand recognition."

"New York has made a very great improvement artistically in the last ten years," says Cecil Howard, another sculptor, recently returned from Paris. "Ten years ago the prevalent American idea of sculpture was the representation of a dead politician in top hat and long coat. Now decorative sculpture is the vogue. The embellishment of our parks and gardens shows that the forward trend is unmistakable."

LORADO TAFT WORKING ON, NOTABLE PLAN TO BEAUTIFY CHICAGO'S MIDWAY



TWENTY-FOOT MODEL OF "THE FOUNTAIN OF TIME." THE COMPLETED WORK WILL BE ABOUT ONE HUNDRED AND TEN FEET LONG AND TWENTY FEET HIGH.

THE Midway transformed—or the metamorphosis of the freak avenue of World's Fair year into the most artistic formal boulevard in the world! That is the change which a great many persons are destined to see, provided they were democratic enough to visit the Midway during Chicago's great exposition of 1893, and provided, also, that they live long enough to see Lorado Taft's plan for beautifying the Midway Plaisance carried to completion. Rapid strides have been made in the work since the plan received official sanction two years ago. But it is a plan so huge that years will yet be required to carry it out. The subject, indeed, is so big and relates to the ornamentation of a territory so large that additions can be made almost indefinitely for generations without losing the value of the work done in the early stages.

The completed project will carry into permanent effect a mile long vista of water, lawn, trees and sculpture such as has never been approached except in the temporary structures of the World's Fair.

At present the Midway is a grassy strip a mile in length and about 1,000 feet wide, connecting Washington and Jackson parks. It has always been the intention of the South Park authorities to extend the depression of the Midway from the lagoons of Jackson Park to the small lakes of Washington Park, thus forming a waterway from park to park. Mr. Taft's plan, which follows the general lines of the great work of the late Daniel H. Burnham in his "Chicago plan," presupposes this straight and formal canal, which is to occupy the present depression at a level lower than the street.

MR. TAFT WORKING ON THE CLAY MODELS OF "THE FOUNTAIN OF TIME."

Photos by Robert H. Morrison

THE MIDWAY AS IT APPEARS TO-DAY, SHOWING BUILDINGS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO.

The Midway Plaisance at the time of the World's Fair, a boulevard only on the city maps, was given over to the booths of fakers and the side shows of the fair. After the fair it became one of Chicago's most beautiful boulevards. Flanking it are the grounds of the University of Chicago, and the proposed scheme of decoration will be an appropriate setting for this seat of learning, which possesses some of the most beautiful buildings in America.

The canal bisecting the Midway will fill the present central depression and will be about 100 feet wide. It will be spanned by three bridges of monumental design, to be dedicated to the three great ideals of the race and to be called "The Bridge of Sciences," "The Bridge of Arts" and "The Bridge of Religions," an adaptation of the "Pont des Arts" in Paris. Along the higher strip of land, some distance back of the canal, and on each side, will stand the statues of the world's greatest idealists. Then at the two ends of the Midway will be the great fountains on which Mr. Taft is now at work—that of "Time" being at the west end and that of "Creation" at the east end.

"The Fountain of Time" will show the human procession passing in review before the great immovable figure of Time. "The Fountain of Creation" will receive the waters of the canal at the extreme western end of the Midway. It is founded on the myth of Deucalion, the Noah of Greek legendary, and his wife, Pyrrha, the only mortals saved by Zeus after the nine days flood. Mr. Taft's composition will show the monsters when the stones, cast from the Titan's head to repeople the earth, are changing into men and women, rising out of the clod and flood and fog into life and light.